

Epist.

435⁴

Epist.

Letter

u

A
L E T T E R

T O T H E

Rev^d. WILLIAM WHISTON A. M. &c.

[Price One Shilling.]



CA

LETTER

TO THE

Rev^d. WILLIAM WHISTON A. M.

Occasioned by his

PUBLICATION

OF THE

MEMOIRS

OF HIS OWN

LIFE.

*The Lord knoweth the Thoughts of Man, that they are
vain.*

Pfal. lxxxiv. 11.

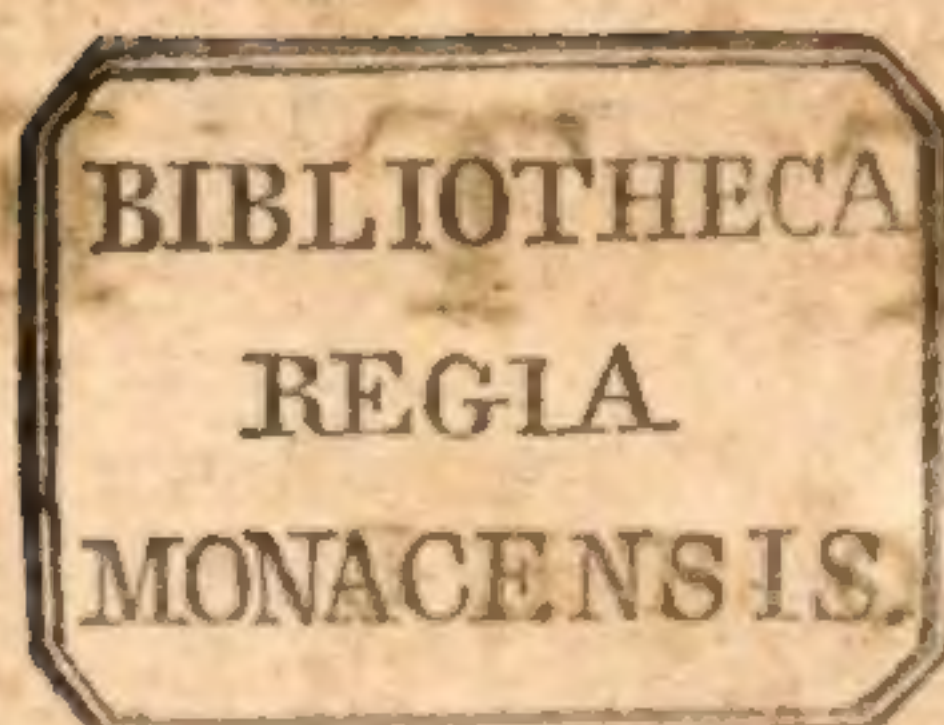


L O N D O N:

Printed for T. WILCOX, at *Virgil's Head* in the Strand.

M D C C L.

352. *Ac.*



Rev. William Weston, A.M.

Occasioned by the

PUBLICATION

OF THE

MEMOIRS

OF HIS OWN

LIFE

The first number of the *Philosophy of Man*, that is to say
Phil. lxxix. 11.



LONDON:
Printed for T. Warton, at *St. Dunstons* in the
Middle



A
L E T T E R
T O T H E

Rev^d. *William Whiston*, A. M. &c.

S I R,



WHILST you was composing your *Me-
moirs*, the last passion, I dare say, which
you dreamt of exciting, in the minds of
your readers, was that of pity ; and yet,
notwithstanding that, I am apt to think,
that in Nine out of Ten, it was the first, if not the only
passion you excited in them. For my part, I must
own I felt it very strong in me, upon reading a very
few pages ; this mixed with some small degree of con-
tempt, which I perceived arising as I went along,
did I confess, work me at last, into a real fit of grief,
both for myself and the whole race of mankind ; and
that, because one of our common nature, could live
till your time of day, and still continue, to entertain
of himself an opinion so different from that the
rest of mankind had of him, and at the same time,
(unhappily for him) so inconsistent with every notion of
real truth and piety. Had I not luckily heard, that
you have declar'd against the eternity of hell-torments,
I'm afraid, the odious passion of anger would have
found harbour in my breast, by the time I had gone
thro' your book ; for upon a supposition that you had
B been

been on the other side of the question, I must have concluded that all the scandalous characters you have drawn, was in your own mind, so many mittimus's to send the subjects of them to eternal death ; in which case, I should have had as good a reason for being angry, (which indeed must be a bad one at the best) as anger can have, because I am so well convinced, that there is not a single person mentioned in your book, whom you have undertaken to villify, but who is in every point of view full as good a man as yourself, and many of them much better. As therefore you do not maintain the eternity of hell-torments, I'll call, for once, your not sending all the people to eternal damnation, a piece of charity in you, tho' I must beg of you not to plume yourself upon that concession ; because I must tell you farther, that that very charity is founded upon your ignorance in that matter, and in your not knowing what you say, nor whereof you affirm : For had you an understanding concerning either of these, you would not only know, that hell-torments are eternal, (which is as plain as the nose upon your face) but you would know also, that no child of *Adam* will be *eternally* damn'd.

If it be an act of charity to pity a man who thinks himself better than he is, in as much as it argues in him the highest degree of folly, then may I safely declare, that I know not upon earth a man to whom this act is more applicable than yourself ; for unless I could assure myself, that an aspiring self-sufficient overbearing spirit, a spirit that would gladly bring the understandings of all men, to a pitch capable of being governed by its own dictates ; I say, till I can believe that to be a gospel spirit, I never can believe you to be that good man, which you would willingly persuade the world you are.

If you have done me the favour to read so much of this *Letter*, I make no doubt but you have concluded me a thorough-paced Athanasian ; but be not in-

too

too great a hurry ; for, believe me, had you vindicated the Athanasian Creed, as much as you have decried it, I should not have thought you ever the better or worse man : my reason is this ; your own vanity suggested to you that disagreement with it at first, and the same vanity has kept it alive ever since ; so that had the truth of it been a novel point at that time, and you as likely to give an alarm to the world, as you imagine you have done by your opposition to it, such are my sentiments of you, that I am apt to think you would have embraced the opposite opinion. Now this can be no uncharitable remark, for whoever reads your own *Memoirs*, or knows any thing of your life exclusive of them, must certainly be convinced, that affectation and vanity, a desire of singularity, and to ride upon the necks of other mens opinions, have been motives which have had far the greatest share of all that labour and pains which you have taken in the literary world, from the beginning of your studies.

It was your sagacious advice to a person in your *Memoirs*, whose name I have forgot, “ not to lean to his own understanding.” But much more sagacious would it have been in you, first of all to have applied it to yourself ; for doubtless there never was a man, to whom that sentence both was, and is more applicable than to you, who have leaned so long to your own wayward understanding, that I take it you are now fallen into the very center of error. Was not this in a great measure the case, what man of sense would think of introducing into the world a six - shilling - book, with a silly dream and a fond persuasion, and they too of such a nature, as none but old women would repeat, nor any but children attend to. There is another excellent saying which you have not I’m sure much attended to, and which is express’d in three small monosyllables, and that is “ Know thy self ; ” a piece of wisdom, to the knowledge of which you seem an intire stranger : The spirit of dictating to others has quite ex-

cluded the spirit of self-reflection; so that by constantly attempting to make yourself the standard of goodness, truth, and rectitude to others, you have unhappily missed the true idea of any one of them yourself. Don't deceive yourself, Mr. *Whiston*, so far as to imagine, that either the glory of God, or good of mankind have ever been any inducement to that restless disposition of yours, to lay before the world every now and then, its own whims and inventions, the least knowledge of yourself, would have read you quite another lesson; it would have shewn you, that even when you ran counter to your own then present temporal interest, you had no better a motive for so doing, than the pleasure of gratifying your own obstinacy and pride.

A contempt of other people's opinions, an overweening partiality for your own, with a fancied superiority in point of judgment, over the rest of mankind, these, to give them all together the softest name I can think of, have been the reigning foible of your life; a foible not less criminal in the sight of God than that you rudely stigmatize my Lord *Effex* with; for so far I am sure, that if the sins of the spirit are more provoking to heaven than the sins of the flesh, and that they are, there wants very little casuistry to prove, then does Lord *Effex*, (supposing neither of you have repented, and it appears not at all that you have) stand a better chance for the kingdom of heaven than you, in as much as he is less sinful. But not to trouble you with any determination either concerning yourself or him (with regard to another world, for I pretend not to it) thus much I will venture to affirm, that whatever detriment my Lord *Effex*'s crime may have been to him, yours, 'tis pretty plain, has depriv'd you of any true gospel light or knowledge.

Was not your *Memoirs* a thing of to-day, a book that may excite a man's curiosity for present amusement, never to be thought on more by him, or at all by any body else some few years hence; Was it not infallibly doom'd

doomed to the grocer, or the dust and cobwebs of some lumber-room ; Was not this, I say, the case ; what a manifest injury, would you have done to that lord's character, by your gross unprovok'd and unchristian notification of, and censure upon, that precipitate action ! an action, which any man of common humanity would suppose, he no sooner had done than he repented of ; an action, tho' wrong in itself, yet unattended with any of those very sad circumstances, which oftentimes makes a crime of that nature a thousand times more heinous ; yet, falling unluckily within the cognizance of a person of your busy, meddling temper, (I say unluckily, because that knowledge of it seems to have had no other effect, than blackening his character) you did not only, like an uncharitable man, make the most of it you could, at that time, in order to recommend yourself for somebody to the Prince and Princess of *Wales*, (which I must always believe, to be your motive at the bottom) but now, in order to feed the same vanity, and swell an impertinent volume, you endeavour, as far as you are able, to hand it down to all posterity. Is this your primitive christianity, Mr. *Whiston* ; no, Sir, assure yourself, that you want the very essence of it. All your thundering legions, and apostolical constitutions, have not helped you to some certain virtues, opposite to conceitedness, self-sufficiency and spiritual pride ; and least you should not know what they are, (as tis not impossible) I'll tell you, they are humility, candor, diffidence, a consciousness of the weakness and depravity of human reason in general in its best natural state, and of your own in particular, which is very far from being so. For I take it, that even that reason which God gave you, is much more blind, deprav'd, and corrupted than it was fifty or sixty years ago, and I account for it, from that petulancy and sauciness in your temper, which, like a hec tick in the body, has continually dried and parched

it,

it, till what now remains consists of little more than sense and obstinacy.

The mention of this last bad quality, as being a heavy ingredient, the composition of your mind, brings to my remembrance what some naturalists have maintained, *viz.* that in the external or sensitive part of man, the nature of some animal is more predominant than the rest ; in confirmation of which assertion, they have a flagrant example in you, in whose composition, the nature of a pig seems to reign very much : For *first*, with regard to your obstinacy, that of a pig is well known to be proverbial, and whether or no your title to that is indisputable, I leave the world to judge. *Secondly*, Whether or no you love the stink of filth and mire, to wallow in the weak side of human nature, and there to give the most envious and ill-natured turns to every circumstance that will bear them, let those persons judge, who have read your *Memoirs* ; and, *thirdly* and *lastly*, to shew your intire uniformity with the qualities of these animals, like one of them in summer, who not being able to find moisture to cool himself, is forced to go in quest of filth and nastiness, in order to remedy that inconvenience, as far as he can ; so you, not being able to satiate your spite and ill-nature, with descanting upon actions, which have a possibility of proceeding from bad motives, have routed for draught in such as have scripture reason and common sense, not only to countenance, but abett them ; and with you truly to marry is a crime : Had your wife died thirty or forty years ago, and you from that time continued single, one might have thought, that the unlawfulness of second marriages had been another silly article of your creed ; but as the case stands, you have not the shadow of a pretence for thrusting your harping iron in here. To put the best-natured construction we are able upon this treatment of yours, I think we can infer no less, than that reflecting now upon the folly and mis-

misconduct of your past life, in not sitting down quietly and like a christian with your opinion; you envy and repine at the success and prosperity of others.—

Pity it is, I think, that some affliction or mortification had not humbled you in early life, so as to have brought you to some tolerable sense of your shameless vanity; then might that learning, which in your present circumstances I take to be your greatest unhappiness, have been an ornament to your self, and blessing to your country; but alas! you have sown it in a field, where the weeds are so rank and offensive, that the whole crop is infected and poisoned by them. This is so much the case, and to so great a degree, that I look upon any particular opinion, how true and likely soever it may otherwise be, rather to suffer than receive any advantage for your happening to strike in with it. The notion of a millennium I always took to have some foundation of probability in it, but I must own, since your calculation, and unprecedented assurances thereupon, it has rather fallen than risen in my esteem. My reason is this, I am afraid you predict and dogmatize concerning the millennium, from the same spirit of whim and caprice, that you predicted the dissolution of the world some years ago.—

Have you forgot, Mr. *Whiston*, the remarkable conclusion of a conversation that happened between you and the late master of *Trinity-college; Cambridge*, upon the subject of that last mentioned event? if you have, I will refresh your memory with it, as it was told, by a fellow, a very grave gentleman of that college. The Doctor and you having had some previous discourse concerning this matter, the particulars of which the gentleman not being able to recollect, you at last roundly told him, that you was very sure, nay absolutely sure, that in such a year, I forget the number, the world would have an end: To which the Doctor answered, that be you as sure as you would of it, he was full as sure of the contrary; upon which you replied,
with

with your wonted warmth and impatience, that if it did not so fall out, you would give up the whole Bible; to which the Dr. thought fit to make no other reply, than to laugh (as he did) heartily at your absurd credulity.

If this and such like conversations, of which I understand you had many with him, had humbled your pride, as the Doctor, I suppose, intended they should, it had been well for you, before you had finished your * holy course; but that good opinion of your self, which has been your ruin hitherto, is such † grass, as neither he, nor any man, could ever mow from under your feet; and his kind offices in order to do it, is I dare say, the true reason (whether he was a sceptic or no I know not) of your handing him down for such to succeeding ages. But this I take it you call gratitude for the many marks of friendship which you received from Dr. *Bentley*; and the many and great favours to your family from his late pious and benevolent lady.

And now, Sir, give me leave to ask you, how it comes to pass that the late mentioned notable event concerning the world's dissolution is so gently slipped over; I see nothing tending to a discovery of it, but one single line in an obscure corner of your book, where you talk something of another chronology; had you consulted the entertainment of your readers, you would have discussed more largely upon it, there being no passage, I am pretty sure, in your valuable *Memoirs*, that would have afforded them more mirth and entertainment. But the reason is plain, *there* is nothing can be extracted out of that passage in your life, to feed your vanity; *there* you are shewn in your true colours; we cannot turn up our eyes, and in admiration say, *Whiston* the great, the learned, the judicious, but *Whiston* the rash, headstrong, impetuous and obstinate. I cannot leave this passage without wondering,

* Vid. mem. 635. † lb p. 114.

that the contempt, which all sober men had for your absurd prediction, before the time, in which the event was to happen, expired; and the universal sneer from men of all ranks, after it had expired, did not, in some sort, mortify that daring spirit of vanity. One might have reasonably thought, that your heat and vigour, in maintaining other opinions full as much, if not more, out of your sphere, might have been a little damp'd and abated by such a disappointment. A man, with the least grain of modesty, would have been ashamed, after such a notable blur upon his character, to have talked in that haughty dogmatical strain, which you have continued to talk in ever since. The truth of the matter is, fain would you lead mankind by the nose: those who will not suffer you, you abuse and throw dirt upon; what reason else can be given for that overflowing of rancour and scurrility, with which you so liberally bespatter the reputations of so many persons, whose bearings in the world have not only been moderately, but highly esteemed by the generality of mankind? But they well know, that merit in any shape must pay her tax to pretending envy.

Do you imagine, that you are not guilty of some small breach of charity, in regard to this particular? do not you think, that your conduct is highly blameable as a Christian? Truly I think it is, even supposing your conjectures and remarks to be true; but if they are false, as I believe in a great measure they are, what are you then? O! but you are the * downright, upright, honest man, the champion for truth, the criterion of equity, the standard of virtue, the vindicator of the Deity, a witness for truth in a wicked and perverse generation! all those, and many more such like qualifications, 'tis plain, in the tendency of your discourse, you very cordially apply to yourself, and hug yourself in the imaginary possession of them. To rivet this delusion more strongly in your mind, you

* Vid. Mem.

are thoroughly satisfied, that they who don't agree with you in these particulars, are drawn aside, either through interest or envy; so that you are ready, at all times, to fix the mark of a scoundrel upon every man, whose sentiment of things does not exactly square with your own. In the mean time, I doubt not you fancy yourself a man of great humility, candor, and moderation, that you, good man! are only angry at the follies and vices of mankind; and that your whole aim and design is the glory of God, and the good of your fellow-creatures. Deceive not yourself, Mr. *Whiston*, an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit; your heart is too deeply immers'd in selfishness, your faculties too strongly tinged with emulation and conceit; you have been serving too long the mammon of your own dear reputation and glory, no less criminal, depend upon it, than the mammon of money, for any disinterested Christian principles to find room in your composition.

Your learning is merely literal, without any judgment or true knowledge; your morality is built upon vague and uncertain principles; and your manner of philosophizing upon it vulgar and false. To give one instance of the truth of this remark, out of many, I shall only mention your high encomiums on Mr. *Woolaston*, a man pretty much of your own stamp; if there is any degree of betterness on either side, it seems to be his, who does not appear to have had quite so much vanity as yourself; as to true ethical knowledge, I take neither of you to know any thing at all of the matter; for what man, think you, whose philosophy was not superficial and vulgar, and who did not judge according as things appeared to the common sense of mankind, would talk of indifferent actions, and then infer by-and-by, (as if he knew not what he was about) that whenever there was not a reason for doing a thing, there was always one against it: is this talking like a philosopher?

No,

No, but like Mr. *Woolaston*, and Mr. *Whiston*, Was he alive, I would send him, as I do you, to read the heathen philosophy, and to understand, if you can, the spirit, as well as letter of it ; or, if you do not like that, go but to the *New Testament*, and get somebody to learn you the spirit of that too, (of which as yet, I doubt, you are utterly ignorant) and you will soon be ashamed to talk of indifferent actions.

But now, give me leave to enter a little upon your favourite topic, this grand Athanasian heresy, and give me leave also, to assure you sincerely, that had you suffer'd upon that account, as you would make the world believe you have, I should reverence you ; for, if an erroneous conscience is allow'd to oblige, (as it is) then even supposing the Athanasian Creed to be true, your suffering for an opposite opinion would not be the less meritorious. In your own wise head, I grant, you think you have suffer'd upon that account ; but if you would, and could consult that part of you, from whence our Saviour says, evil thoughts proceed, you would find, in truth, that the Athanasian Creed is no part of the matter that you have been fighting about, and that in reality, you care not a straw whether it be true or false ; your heart, I say, would tell you, if you impartially consulted it, that it is your own oracular wisdom, reputation, and superiority of judgment, which you have been all along endeavouring to establish, and for a medium to these, you have pitch'd upon the Athanasian Creed ; whereas your spirit and temper is of that complexion, that had there been no Athanasian Creed for you, you certainly would have found something else to have made the very same noise about, and to have built the same behaviour upon. People that suffer for what they think to be true, and have not their own self-honour at the bottom, behave in a quite different manner from what you have done ; they do not kick, and cuff, and spit, and call every body fools and knaves that do not agree with
them,

them, as you have done ; but are quiet, patient, and silent, unless they have had different reasons for speaking than what you have had, and then it was done in a manner no ways similar to yours ; but you have retained and maintained your opinion in such a boisterous strange manner, that whether it be true or false, the prejudice to yourself is equally great and unhappy. For if a man is to be judged at the last day, according to the good or evil disposition of his heart, and not by the knowledge of his head ; if we are to be try'd by the perversity or uprightness of our wills, and not by the dulness or perspicuity of our understandings, as will doubtless be the case ; then what situation are you in, when that truth you have hit upon, (supposing it such) has only tended to inflame the natural depravity of your understanding, to make your will more perverse and untractable, your passions more headstrong and violent, than probably otherwise they would have been ?

Indeed it cannot be said that you have a zeal (in one sense) without knowledge ; for, I believe, you have all the book-knowledge you can have in that affair (and in many other matters, of that sort of knowledge, I confess, not a little) ; but then it must be said, that you have knowledge with a very bad zeal, which has pushed you farther from the humility of the gospel, than ('tis to be fear'd, if such a thing can be) your mother bore you. — However do not imagine, that I think you a bit worse than they, (if any such there be) who have made as great a bustle for the Athanasian Creed, as you have against it ; for I apprehend, that they that are for it, and they that are against it, are equally to blame, if they hold it more than an opinion, with which they have no farther concernment, and that on which side soever the truth lies. Now, supposing it false, what I say will readily be allow'd ; but supposing it true, I dare maintain, that, *as such*, God never did, nor never can require us to believe it. For God can

can never require his creatures to believe any thing, how true soever it may be, unless of that truth he has given sufficient evidence. Now, I would gladly know, whether or no there is evidence sufficient for believing in any determinate manner of God's existence, or, which is the same thing, in any scheme concerning the Trinity: If you say there is evidence sufficient for your scheme, as I suppose you will, then I would ask you, whether that evidence of yours is capable either of addition or diminution? If it is capable of either of these, as in the nature of the thing it must, then do you believe a truth upon insufficient evidence, which is full as absurd, as to disbelieve a truth when the evidence is sufficient, and from whence it plainly follows, that you have been acting a wicked part, or at least a weak one; a wicked one, in pretending to believe and declare a truth, which God intended not to reveal, else would he have given evidence sufficient; or a weak one, in imagining the evidence sufficient, when it is not so, as being in its nature capable of addition. If you say, that the evidence for a truth may be more or less sufficient, and that God expects our assent to it, when the evidence might have been greater, it is talking so much like a school-boy, making such sad work with the Almighty's attributes, and the Almighty himself so captious a being, that for an answer I would have you weigh the consequence. In the mean time, give me leave to tell you, that the truth of any opinion, which in its nature is subject to a greater or less degree of evidence, is a matter that neither is, or ought to be, any concernment to us. All that we ought to concern ourselves with, is to find out what desire we intend to gratify in embracing it, (which is not always to promote the glory of God, though we may think, and would have it thought so) and the effect it has upon our minds. For a man may imagine, that it is the cause of truth for which he contends, and that proposition may indeed be absolutely true, in the defence of which he is engaged; yet notwithstanding this, in that

very

very eagerness and contention for it, it becomes error to him, and a medium only to his own praise. And therefore, if one man is for the Trinity, and another against it, he whose opinion tends to promote in him christian humility, and to better the natural depravity of his temper and disposition, is on the right side, and that opinion, with respect to himself, is what it ought to be, and indeed the truth, howsoever disguised in the conception ; whilst he, whose opinion has the contrary effect, which increases his pride, and gives a handle for his ill-nature to work upon, his opinion is absolutely wrong to himself, and has no more than the appearance of truth, which is error, how true soever it be in itself. The reason is this, all knowledge, in which opinion is concerned, is merely ideal, and dependent upon our acquaintance with matter, (which acquaintance sin produced, therefore we ought not to have had it). We are very sure, that matter does not exist in eternity, and therefore, all opiniative knowledge, in this sense material, is heterogeneous to the nature of the soul, and must depart from it, when-ever it exists independent of time, its true existence. So that our opinions, *as such*, can never do us either good or harm one way or other ; but that good or bad disposition, which they are suffered to engender in the heart or soul, will do us all the good or harm that can be done to us, and will as naturally determine us to happiness or misery, as the sparks fly upward. If they have made us proud, supercilious, obstinate, and self-sufficient, we must go to that place, whence these take their original ; if they have formed in our minds opposite dispositions, the opposite situation must be our lot.

It would be a great pleasure to me (though I look upon it as morally impossible) to make you sensible that whether your opinion be right or wrong, 'tis of no moment at all, and that, concerning that affair, you neither ought, nor can believe, any thing explicitly ; and yet you must own, that this very knowledge of
yours

yours is merely dependent upon your acquaintance with books and languages, that your assurance is of so precarious a nature, that 'tis not only possible, but probable, that there may be reasons, if your obstinacy would let you attend to them, either by some addition or diminution of the evidence, for the alteration of your opinion, more than once ere you die. Do not therefore comfort yourself with the Apostle's expression, *that it is a good thing to be zealous in a good cause* ; because yours is not a good cause, as you maintain it, but an ill-founded cause, dependent upon the veracity and fallability of others ; and for you, or any man, to interest himself in the opinion of other men from external evidence only, which in its nature is insufficient, is, how true soever the opinion may be, a degree of wickedness ; so that, as I before observed, if your notion be the truth, it is held in unrighteousness, consequently as great an error as it can be with respect to yourself. For the worst effect, that the worst notions can have, is only to make a man wicked ; now, if true notions have a possibility of having the like effect, where they have it, with respect to that man, I can see no difference. The conclusion I draw from hence is this, that whether your notion be right or wrong, it is, to you, of no signification at all ; and, that had you maintained and suffered for the orthodox notion of the Trinity, (the natural pride and rancour of your disposition continuing the same,) your character as a good or bad man would not in the least have been altered.

Now, altho' the orthodox manner of the existence of God be the true manner of his existence, yet certain it is, that the Almighty neither did, does, nor ever can, demand from us an explicit belief of it. Whatever is above our reason, or contrary to our reason, must be the same thing to us, where reason is at all concerned. All arguments therefore, from such a postulatum in the negative, are a mere shuffle of ignorance and interest, and do great despite to the power and

and goodness of the Almighty Creator. But indeed whatever is above our reason, must be contrary to it ; for whatever is above reason, is either similar in its nature to the nature of reason, or dissimilar ; if it be similar, then it is of a piece with reason, and reason may see its propriety ; if dissimilar, there can be nothing more contrary. But to suppose the matter above, and not contrary, as some would have the mystery of the Trinity, give me leave to ask, why should God demand our assent to any truth with which reason is supposed to have so much to do, as to understand, that it is above it, unless for our good, or his glory ? But an explicit belief of the manner of God's existence can no way tend to promote our good in any greater degree, than what the simple faith in him, as one or alone, will effect ; and to suppose, that the glory of God can be promoted by the mediation of man, at the same time that it has no tendency to promote his good, is certainly to destroy the sufficiency of the Almighty.

It is not unlikely, but that a man given to speculation may think it probable, that the Deity does exist in Trinity ; many wise men have thought so before the coming of Christ ; and do think so still, exclusive of Revelation. Some, from a conformity to, and manifestation of, a similar power in the material creation ; in which, new and consubstantial properties, hidden or involved in the same subject, do sometimes appear to discover themselves in a surprising manner. Others again, investigating of, and speculating upon, the qualities of their own minds, have perceived or thought that they perceived, a Trinity of powers therein, inseparable from, and operating in each other. This perception, often thought upon, and answering, or seeming to answer, in such particulars as are only knowable to a man's self, may easily induce them to entertain an opinion, that in such, or some such manner, the Deity may exist ; but especially, if he
comes

comes to know, that his soul is a resemblance of the Divine nature, or was created in the image of God: Here is such an argument, as must add many degrees of probability to his former evidence. For thus he may argue; if the soul of man exists in three distinct powers, whose union are inseparable, and whose importance are equal, (as to me it appears) and if God created that soul in his own resemblance, then the Creator, if that is an image of himself, must exist in three distinct powers, whose union is inseparable, and whose importance is equal. Nay, it is not impossible, but that from a consideration of a man's own thoughts, words and actions, and from perceiving how each of them do constantly imply the power and existence of the other two, he may conclude, that the manner of God's existence may be shadowed forth under that conception; but especially if he thinks, that in the nature and essence of these, he can trace (tho' at a great distance) a resemblance of the name and nature of God in Trinity.

It may not perhaps be thought a disgrace to any man's understanding, if, from some, or all these, he may be induced to entertain an *opinion* concerning the manner of God's existence; but still the evidence, (without divine vision, and that can only be to himself) is far from being sufficient; consequently he ought not, neither is there any occasion to make of it an explicit article of faith: For he never can be sure, that his ideas of, and observations upon, the hidden qualities of matter, are absolutely to be depended upon; he can never be sure, that the reflection made upon his own mind, and its operation in thought, word, and deed, are exactly genuine: There may be objections against his hypothesis, which he can never come to the knowledge of, which may destroy these and all other arguments, which tended before to the establishment of his opinion; wherefore, under the assurance of the existence of a God, he can only entertain an opinion

concerning the manner of it, for which opinion he is no more blameable, if it be false, than to be commended, if true ; for why ; the truth of his opinion is not self-evident, it is founded upon certain degrees of probability, which degrees, in whole or part, being out of his power, those he comes at are merely by accident ; and then in such a manner, that, was he to come to the true knowledge of them, it might intirely alter their property ; wherefore I say it is necessary, that he hold his notion concerning the *manner* of God's existence as an opinion only, for two reasons ; in the first place, for fear it should not be true ; and, *secondly*, which is worse, for fear, if it should be true, that he holds it upon insufficient evidence ; for, if that evidence, which has its foundation in and from time, cannot be a sufficient proof for the belief of an eternal truth, then can it never be agreeable to the will of God, that any man should believe an eternal truth upon such evidence.

To return then to the question once more, and to suppose, that either your scheme, or the orthodox scheme, of the manner of God's existence, is true, yet it must be confessed, that it can be no part of our Creden-
da, neither have we any commands, from within or without, to believe it *as such*.

Whether God is one or more, does not seem to be any concern of ours ; for, if that plurality unites in one supreme, he who believes in that one supreme, by consequence must believe in the manner of that one supreme's existence, let the manner be what it will.

Suppose a person not only says, but does believe in God, as preach'd by Jesus Christ ; and suppose another asks him, if he believes the Trinity ; he may answer very justly and piously, that whether God exists in unity, duality, trinity, quaternity, or more, he neither does, nor pretends to know ; but that as he believes in God, so of course he is sure, that he believes implicitly in the manner of God's existence, tho' of that manner, he

he is, and must be intirely ignorant, till he departs this life ; then if the knowledge of that manner will be any addition to his happiness, he may religiously hope, that he shall be acquainted with it.—Nor can any-body be said to believe, properly speaking, any-thing concerning the manner of God's existence, in any other shape ; people like you, may talk of differences and distinctions, and of a truth being above our reason, and contrary to our reason, and maintain there is one without the other ; but 'tis mere figment and invention, built upon prejudice, and, without divine illumination, said at random.

It is to be lamented that you was not an able-bodied man during the great dispute between *Sherlock* and *South* ; there would have been a fine ball for you to have bounded, and caught again ; for, I doubt not, but you would have very wisely decided the dispute for them both, and upon their ruins erected some whim of your own. If this had happened to have been the case, there would have been a triumvirate of very deep men, in their own eyes extreamly sagacious, with only this misfortune attending them, that they not only could not know what they really believed concerning the matter, but at the same time might have the highest moral certainty, that, allowing for a little caprice and the influence of prejudice, they might every one of them have been as much of each others opinion, as they were of their own. For it does not follow, that because one man writes for, and another against, the Trinity, or any other opinion, that therefore they believe, as they think they do ; it might as likely happen, that they believe as much each others opinion, or the same, as that they are of different opinions, had they the good fortune to know what they believed : wherefore, had *Sherlock* and *South* changed the places of their birth, their education, the company they kept, and books they read, had they entered at all into such a dispute, in all probability, it would have been by turn-

ing the tables. For nothing is more common, than for people to adopt opinions from interest, passion, or prejudice, all which they very comfortably overlook, pretending, 'tis a matter of conscience, that sets them upon rumaging for arguments to support them.

And this must be the case with every one, who without being admitted into the beatific vision, will peremptorily determine concerning the manner of God's existence; for at last, it must come to this issue: they who believe in God, do certainly believe right concerning the manner of his existence, even though, through some prejudicial step in their education, or some inaptitude in their rational faculties, they should chance to conceive wrong concerning it; and they that do not believe in God, are certainly wrong, though they may chance to maintain the truth. For 'tis mere chance on both sides; 'tis what neither of them can be infallibly certain of, therefore what neither of them ought to believe.

And now what becomes of all this cursing in this direful Creed, that runs so in your poor head: the whole matter you see comes to this; they that believe in God, do believe implicitly in the catholic faith, and are saved, let your scheme, or the orthodox scheme, or any other, be the right one: They that do not believe in God, are damned, whether they believe the Athanasian Creed or no, for if they say they believe it, and have no faith in God, (as they have not, if they believe in any scheme, or opinion concerning it; for then it becomes Mammon to them) they are only giving an opinion, *as such*, neither right nor wrong.

If a person says he believes in God, but denies the Athanasian Creed; if he does believe in God, and if the Athanasian Creed be true, this is an error in his judgment, dependent upon the light he had to judge by, (if he will judge) and he certainly does believe the Athanasian Creed, if it be true, whether he thinks so or not: For truth

is

is one and indivisible, and no man ever did, or can believe any one single, absolute, eternal truth, but he must believe every truth. Mankind seem to be divided into a multiplicity of opinions; and 'tis an old proverb, so many men so many minds; but in fact it is not so; for the world would be separated into two opinions, which then would change their nature and become self-evident truths, if they knew themselves. It is but a man's setting aside opinion, which, how true soever, can have no better a foundation than his own brain, and he would perceive ultimately that he is an Infidel or a Christian, and that in truth, without setting up a principle neither good nor bad, there can be no medium. For there is truth, light, goodness, wisdom, and more such like, all which mean the same, and are inseparable: And there is error, darkness, evil, folly, all which mean the same, and are inseparable: Now to one of these, as in unity with themselves, but eternal discord with each other, every man would find himself belong, which is believing or living in it, would he but cease to look at, or could he but look beyond, that confused heap of opinions, jumbled together in his own brain, in themselves neither right nor wrong, but which he, and other men, call either right or wrong, according to the prejudice by which, or the medium through which, they happen to see the same thing.

If you, or any one, after what he has read, or (if he thinks it worth his while) may read farther, shall think me as whimsical as you, I readily allow the charge; but with this difference, that I am so far from demanding an assent to what I say, that 'tis only given as an opinion. I neither have, nor pretend to prove any thing affirmatively, and, if I have any view in writing, beyond my own amusement, it is the entertainment of those, (if any such there be) who may chance to think like me. Now then, if you have a mind to ask, why we are bewildered, in such a seeming multiplicity of opinions, why we utter such a babel of words,

words, and perform such a medley of actions, some said to be wrong, some right, and some indifferent ; it may be answered, that if the soul is a resemblance of God in Trinity, then it appears highly probable, that the second power of that soul, *viz.* the will, in which particularly consists the identity of our spiritual nature, is — (what may be express'd many more ways though as incompleatly) *where it should not be* ; hence the original of opinion itself, and all the confusion consequent thereupon, commonly called the weakness, sometimes the depravity, of our nature. The desires of all men, the first principle, and foundation of the soul, are truly good ; for the bad as well as good do all desire to be happy (and out of Heaven there is no happiness) : all men desire to go to Heaven or Paradise, from whence they came, to please God, and to imitate him ; the good in his moral, the bad in his natural attributes ; and was the will in union with this desire, as in the good it is (though in the bad it never can be separated) we should be, (with respect to the soul or inner-man) in the highest degree of creatural perfection. But the will, we may perceive, deludes, or what may be termed deviates, from that desire continually, man being in his natural state ; for being where it should not be, it seeks for that happiness there, *viz.* in this world, which happiness exists only in God or Paradise, from whence it is come into this world, where it naturally is, but should not be. Now, from this good desire, involved and blinded in a depraved will, arises the knowledge of all the good and evil, right and wrong, dependent upon this world ; which knowledge takes its rise from, or is accounted what it is, *viz.* right or wrong, merely from opinion, and which opinion being compounded of arguments for and against, is plainly a deprivation of intuitive knowledge ; therefore must continue to be an evil whenever the soul communicates with it, in every shape, till the will is again restored to an union with that desire, which is departing from this world,

world; then, with respect to the soul, opinion wholly departs, and such a person walks by faith, and not by sight, *i. e.* opinion: In this world, I say, he lives by faith, and knowledge implicitly, and when the place of this opinion shall be done away, by faith and knowledge explicit or intuitive, which can only be with God.

If it be ask'd further, how in our wills we are become depraved, and will evil; the answer is plain, from a consideration of ourselves, without running to scripture; that the first man, or at least a man prior to our existence, must have left that happiness, or Paradise, (else how could we desire to go thither?) and came into this world; which thing from the same analogy we may perceive, he did not desire to do, upon a supposition that he should leave Paradise, or compleat happiness, no more than a wicked man desires to go to Hell; but when some abuse of his happiness had certainly made way for the power of that delusion to affect him, he was deluded. The terms of his delusion, (according to scripture) tho' absolutely false, yet were relatively true; for he was told, that he should be as God, knowing good and evil; (and so far it was true, with respect to his imagination, the scene of good and evil in this world) but that that knowledge would be his misery, and would naturally shut him out of Paradise, (the absolute and eternal consequence of the will's deviation from eternal truth;) that was a consequence he was far from chusing, but like his dutiful children, he desired what we have all desired since, and that is only an impossibility, *viz.* to be happy both here and there, or in time and eternity together. But so soon as he found his mistake, so soon he found himself surrounded with all the appendages necessary for a creature of this world; his will, by which before he enjoyed the beatific vision, had turned itself to, and was rivetted upon, this world; and without any other exertion of itself, time, place, and matter

matter, consequently corruption, &c. opened to his view: Hence that depravity and vanity to himself; which is our natural inheritance, and which every man, so soon as he comes to seek for Paradise, (his true native place) in the things of this world, does feel, and fear, and see.

Again, as the first man by his will, and in his will, did live unto that compleat happiness, which we all desire, so it was by his will, and so it is by our wills, that our souls are creatures of this world; and live unto the vanity of it; for, upon whatever our wills are placed, in that is our life, or in that, with respect to the soul, we may be said to live. Thus, when a person hopes for, or thinks he enjoys, any particular pleasure or profit, when he aims at any particular attainment or qualification, or wills (vulgarly desires) to appear in any particular light or character; in that will (either as centering in one object, or branching out into more) his soul, or self lives; or in that object his will, which is himself, lives; or, in other words, he has faith in that thing; or, in other words, he believes that to be good; all these being exactly synonymous expressions. Thus then, when our wills are placed upon the things of this world, or, in words of the same import, when they are dead to God, we may be said, in the utmost propriety of the word, to have faith in this world, or to believe that this world is good; when our wills are placed upon God, or, in other words, when we are dead to this world in our wills, then we have faith in God, or believe that God is good: These are an eternal negation to each other, and we cannot make them compatible, would we ever so gladly, no more than we can live in Paradise and this world, and be creatures of both worlds at once or together.

All moral good and evil take their denominations from that object, upon which our wills are placed; there are but two objects upon which they can be placed,

placed, and they are either this world, in some shape and some degree, or God: Now, we can place our wills upon nothing but what we believe to be good; whence it follows, exclusive of all opinion, that we please or displease God ultimately, as we believe him or this world to be good, for it is impossible to believe them both so. A man may talk of believing God to be good, and of an innocent affection for the enjoyments of the world; but here lies the point, are those enjoyments of such a nature, or his will in such a condition, that he had rather stay with them, than depart from them? If he had rather stay, in that very working, or operation of his will, he does more effectually deny the goodness of God, than he could possibly do, was he to set himself about it, by writing a thousand volumes. In that very degree in which we love or desire to stay in this world, in that very degree we deny the goodness of God; and according to that degree, we are further from, or nearer to him. If the edge of our propensity towards any objects or object is so blunted, by any means, whether temporal or spiritual, as that we may perceive within ourselves a distant wish to be delivered from them; in that very degree in which that wish gains ground, in that very degree we hasten to our native place; if at last we are so happy, as to cease to believe this world to be good, (the certain consequence of which is, a resignation to God, and an indifference whether we stay or go) we are then in paradise, our native place, with respect to the soul, or inner-man, and reinstated, in the life and light of truth, wisdom, and goodness: if our propensity to any object, tho' ever so lawful, is not attended (either in whole or in part) with some perception or sensation of this sort, then do we love ourselves only in that object, we are by consequence in the sink of error, folly and evil, and all our pretences to the contrary are idle dreams. Our name, nation and religion, if they help us not to a disunion from this natural faith, stand us in no stead, neither is

it a pin's matter, whether we were born in *Siam*, *Constantinople*, *Rome*, or *London*. We may think and reason, and speculate about opinions, as long as we please, but it is all lost labour, so long as our wills are tied to this world, and we believe it to be good; because from this very faith arises the original darkness of our understandings; our affections, called in the gross the will, being so far the root or origin of our thoughts and opinions, that these latter are only right or wrong, good or evil, let their appearance be what they will, as our affections are. A man may amuse himself, and think with *Ovid*, *video meliora proboq; deteriora sequor*; but he means nothing by it, except what education has taught him; neither is there any more truth in what he says, than if spoke by a parrot, otherwise a *man without God might think a good thought*. Those that say we all know our duty, if we would but practise it, would speak more properly, if they said, we all fancy we know our duty; which fancy, being no true knowledge, but only an opinion, built upon probability, is so far from producing true piety, that the very supposition itself, is in part a hinderance of it; true knowledge and true piety being as inseparable as the whole of the same thing from its two halves. They then that imagine that we have any natural knowledge from reason, which when attended to is able to reform the will, go by hearsay; since it is a denial of, and a departing from every opinion that either has an argument for it, or against it, that is the very first step which every man must and does take, in order to learn true knowledge, and to which he is induced by no reason, but an experimental perception of the vanity of the world, and opinion its offspring, which first opens itself in every man's conscience.

For the will, as under the name of natural conscience, feeling or perceiving the vanity of this world, and of all reason that can be conversant in opinion, which

is just coeval with the world, departs from it for the same reason, and no other, that one fluid departs from another fluid, in their nature heterogenous ; there is no reason for one more than the other ; and it would be strange if there was, for then must time and eternity be the same thing.

Now, both the perception of this vanity, and the ability to depart from it are the gift of God ; but such a gift, as is equally in the consciences of all men, its efficacy only depending upon themselves, *God working in every man both to will and to do*, as soon as our ignorance and folly will let us see our true condition, which indeed is neither better nor worse than the poor *Samaritan's* ; for this ignorance of ourselves, the foundation of all human happiness, or happiness dependent upon this world, being done away, the soul enters into the region of truth and day-light, the foundation of its thoughts is altered ; and tho' in many things, as far as opinion goes, a man may think the same, yet then he does it on different principles and motives. To illustrate this by two instances, which may help to put opinion upon its right footing, which is good, bad, or indifferent, according as we mean by it. Let us suppose a person who believes God to be good, which is the end of the gospel, does, at the same time, think, or is of opinion, that it was the mere pleasure of God, to send his Son to redeem mankind, but that he could have done it many other ways, such an opinion is very pious and good, even tho' it was inconsistent with eternal wisdom, to redeem mankind, but by such a process of his son in our nature. Again, suppose a man never to have heard of the name of Christ, yet, if he has departed from that natural faith, by which we love, or believe this world to be good, which is the very thing Christ died for ; he may imagine what he will, about the means and manner of this, and continue in the same opinion about them, from his birth to his death ; yet

notwithstanding that, every man in the like internal circumstances, who by accident has met with the *New Testament*, and compared what is there written, to what such a person in his conscience must feel, will make no scruple to declare, that tho' he may mistake the name, yet the power is there; and that, if to depart from this world, in our wills or affections, is to be with God, then must the word of God, which Christians call Jesus Christ, infallibly have manifested himself in that man's conscience. And this must be the case of every man, since the first, who disobeyed God; for, if he has ceased in his will to believe this world to be good, nothing but the word of God could effect that, which being once effected, let his name, nation and religion be what they will, he can go no other way, but to his native place, where Christ sits at the right hand of God: So that the only certain and infallible way to happiness and truth; (and indeed no man ever did or can go any other) is not to trouble ourselves with learning to believe, what can only be an opinion, tho' attended with the highest degree of probability; but to learn, *not* to believe, what we find and perceive we do believe, and with which we are daily upbraided, *viz.* that this world is good, (the consequence of the opposite belief must follow of course) or as a divine would say, let us learn first to know what we are, and then think about what we ought to be.

After the great labour and pains that you have taken, in the cause of Christianity, (as you imagine) and the modest encomiums, which you more modestly have given to yourself thereupon, it will be no wonder if you laugh at me, when I tell you, that you have really and truly been an enemy to the cause that you fancy'd you supported. For Christianity is the object of conscience, and not of reason; as operating in the conscience, it is a self-evident truth; as the object of reason, 'tis only a probable opinion; as operating in the conscience, it has been, from the fall of
Adam,

Adam, one and the same, as the object of reason, it has as many appearances as there are men ; as soon as Christianity becomes the object of reason it loses its nature, and is transformed ; for then come arguments for, and objections against it, whereas being a self-evident truth, and that to the conscience only, there never was either one or the other. A person who finds out arguments for the truth of Christianity, does nothing more than establish a probable opinion, which not being the thing itself, but something like it, does in the main prejudice to the reality, by substituting something like it, which can possibly have no more connection with it, than time with eternity, how like soever the longest duration we can conceive may be to it.

They that submit to perceive themselves hurt in their consciences, by the vanity of this world, in any shape, may imagine, that the unhappiness which they feel, is an argument for the truth of Christianity, and for their embracing it ; but indeed it is the very thing itself. For Christianity has nothing to do with any part of us, but that in which we are conscious of happiness or misery. They that are happy from the enjoyment of the things of this world, must unavoidably fear to lose both them and it, in the unhappiness of which fear, and nowhere else, the law of righteousness is a self-evident truth, and does constantly reveal itself a consuming fire. They that are not happy from the things of this world, and believe it not their native place, from thence must naturally arise an hope of being delivered from it ; in the complacency of which hope and no where else the Saviour of the world does constantly reveal himself a most merciful God.

Now you, *Mr. Whiston*, instead of humbling yourself, or departing in your will from this world of opinion and probability, the only way of having the least knowledge of Christ ; have been going as directly from it all your life
as

as you could go ; for you have been puzzling your brain about partial revelations, as of some consequence ; about distinctions between natural and revealed religion, as absurd, and as little true sense in them, as the distinctions between Atheism and Deism, the mere coinage of the brain. Alas ! there is but one God, and there never was but one way ultimately by which we could come to him, the least idea of justice must convince us, that that way must be open to all, from first to last, and accordingly we find, that through the goodness of God it did immediately commence with our disobedience. The Almighty promised, which promise (being the gift of God, and containing or conveying a power, by which we might, in our wills, return the same way home that we went astray) that it might be compleated, and in that completion be of efficacy to every soul of man, Christ or that word took our nature upon him ; I say, for that very reason only, that that promise might have its effect in our consciences ; but as for our hearing of the completion of it, or knowing of it with our outward ears, though like many other blessings of providence, it may be a relative good ; yet neither is that external knowledge, or the use we may make of it when heard of, any part of the gospel dispensation.

To suppose that they who are acquainted with the *New Testament* have the advantage of those who never heard of it, with respect to their eternal salvation, is in effect (notwithstanding all the volumes of glossary and varnish to hide it) to deny every attribute of God, natural as well as moral. That there is a natural religion, and a revealed religion, that one man is saved by this, another by that, is manifestly to make the fountain of truth himself a weak and short-sighted Being. And yet after all 'tis certain, that no man ever was, or will be saved, or come to the knowledge of God, without being partaker of what is meant by faith in Christ Jesus.

If you ask what that faith is, I do not pretend to describe it, but I will endeavour to tell you where it is ; it stands directly in opposition to that faith or affection by which we naturally believe this world to be good ; whatsoever that is which is the death of the former, that is faith in Christ. However to attempt an imperfect definition, I take faith to arise from a power which God gave in his promise to the first sinful man and his posterity ; a power, I say, which should so far affect his depraved will, that he should be conscious of it, (which we call natural conscience) to the influence of which power, they who so far attend, as to perceive and be directed by it, they have faith, or in this view, submit to that power, which power is the word of God or Christ ; they are delivered from the bondage and wrath of this world, to the liberty and purity of paradise, and let such men be born where they will, they are Christians in that religion. I call them Christians, because without that word or promise of God, made effectual by its incarnation in our nature, it cannot be supposed that any man would ever have known any more of natural conscience, than the beasts that perish. A person who attends to natural conscience, or to this power in his conscience, and that in a country where the history of the manifestation of the counter-part of that promise, ratified between seventeen and eighteen hundred years ago, is assented to, is with great propriety said to believe in Christ or be a Christian, in as much as the only *name under Heaven*, given to that power, is Christ Jesus ; but a person who has never heard of the name of Christ, if he has attended, or submitted in his conscience to that power, or in scripture-phrase, *to that light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*, he is not a whit the less a Christian in reality, for not knowing that that power, or word of God, is called Christ ; so that, Christianity though not as old as the creation, is as old as the fall, at which time our redemption

was

was as fully and completely wrought, as if Christ then had actually died ; for the promise was efficacious, because it was to be fulfilled, and Christ was to die : With respect therefore to God, who dwelleth not in time, in whose sight a thousand years are but as yesterday, and who, in our poor comprehensions of things, *does call things that are not, as if they were*, Christ was dead, and the promise was fulfilled, to every salutary and merciful purpose.

An instance in common life may help to illustrate this ; suppose a person makes a promise to another, if the latter receives the benefit of that promise, the time when, and the manner how it is fulfilled, can be of no consequence ; sure he is, that the promise is, or must be performed, which is the samething to him, else how could he receive the benefit ? so the benefit of God's promise being received, it is no more necessary, with respect to his salvation, that any man should know of the time when, or manner how, it was compleated, (as we know that two and two are four, or that there is such a place as *Constantinople*) than it is necessary to the support of life, that he should know of what particular species of food he eats. What providential end God may have to serve, in the general discovery of that great event, farther than the fulfilling of his promise, I know not, no more than I know what providential end he may have to serve in the discovery of the true system of the universe, in bringing about, or suffering the reformation, or any other discovery in nature.

Now if from hence you should gather, that I despise and would abolish all creeds, churches, and revelations, you do me great injustice, because it is my opinion, that received upon a right footing, and submitted to as from the authority of the church, we have all the advantage that we can have of them if they are true, without being the worse for them should they prove false. However to set them aside for a while (especially
with

with respect to those who never heard with their outward ears of Christ) together with your primitive literal Christianity, (which has no more of Christianity in it, than the picture of a man has a man in it) upon what foundation does Christianity stand? certainly upon the most solid and irrefragable, even in the conception of the natural man; for if he will confess, that he believes this world to be good, (and whether he confesses it or no, there is no other foundation of wickedness) and at the same time does confess, the uneasy sensations which must frequently arise, from his inability to comprehend any such knowledge of God or truth, as with assurance he may rest his foot on; I say, if that is perceptible to himself on one hand, and on the other, the emptiness and vanity, not to say sorrow and uneasiness, which the pursuit, or gratification of his desires produce; in that very working of his own mind (exclusive of all probable or hear-say knowledge) he does assent to, and confess (though with trembling) that the word of God is manifest in his conscience. External circumstances may amuse and divert him, and by that means he may keep himself from too quick a sensation of the real condition of his soul, perhaps all his life; but should ever those external circumstances be out of the way, the condition he immediately finds himself in, is that of fear, which (in his imagination he may see in many lights, but indeed) is no other than a fear of losing this world, arising ultimately from his total ignorance of another, in which fear the father is for ever ready to draw every man, to the satisfactory knowledge and hope of his son. Such a person may imagine he believes nothing less than the gospel, and perhaps to any salutary effect it may be so; the reason may likely be, that in his judgment he has determined upon it, from the œconomy of a church, the detail of a creed, or the history of a Revelation, together perhaps with an observation upon the wickedness and folly of an unhappy minister thereof: Having as-

sociated these ideas together, and imagining such an association to be the sum and substance of Christianity, and in that light perceiving it liable to a thousand objections, he presently rejects it, or at least is in doubt about it; whereas Christ is still in his conscience, admonishing him continually to flee from evil, to cease to believe this world good, and his place of rest; to which power, or admonition, if he submits and accepts of, he may call and think himself a Deist, a Free-thinker, or Natural-religionist, or any thing else, according to his education; but at last he will sit down with *Abraham, Isaac* and *Jacob*, in the kingdom of God and his Christ.

Now, if you have a mind to know how it comes to pass, that such defenders of religion as you, such oppugners as *Tindal*, and such ignoramus's as *Woolaston*, have in one sense never done Christianity either good or harm, I'll tell you, though you can * hardly forbear smiling, I am afraid. It is this; you have all set out upon a wrong foundation, and supposed mankind to be what they are not; you say you believe the three first chapters in *Genesis*, but in your writings you consequential-ly deny them. *Tindal* denies original sin in word, but in fact is constantly running his head against it: Now, the end being in the beginning, you have both missed the mark, and instead of Christianity have set up probabilities of your own; for if mankind do not naturally know God, if they cannot naturally perceive truth, exclusive of probability and opinion, with both which Christianity has nothing to do, then does both your jargon and his fall to the ground; if they can do both these, then are we in the original state of our nature.

But indeed neither what you have defended, neither what he has oppugned, is any absolute part of Christianity; he only quarrelled with the œconomy of churches, unfortunately thinking it the substance of, not (that being honestly and wisely used it probably might be)

* Vid. Mem. p. 377.

a medium to Christianity, or true religion; you have retouched and embellished (as you imagine) the Church you found, and have been fighting for it. The object about which you both have been contending, is an insignificant opinion, built upon probabilities, which both of you, from a certain value you set upon your own discernment, have determined to believe, or to unite yourselves to; and in which case you have been equally blameable; and therefore, your opinions being set aside, as of no signification, *Tindal* and yourself are exactly upon a footing, with respect to that temper of mind which determines your moral characters. Have you never perceived, that his faith and yours are exactly the same, and that you only differ in opinion? Have you not perceived, that you both take for granted, and overlook the very thing in question, of which it seems you have no more true knowledge, (tho' you are satisfied you have) than of a substance from its reflection in a glass? Don't you both suppose (he in word, and you in fact) that we have a natural knowledge of God and his attributes, of the eternal laws of truth and righteousness, and our obligations to them: and yet, certain it is, that the knowledge of these is the very thing we want, the sum and substance of Christianity, and of the truth of which a man can no more be convinced, by any argumentative deductions, than a beast of the nature of *Syllogism*. Your friend *Woolaston* indeed says, that such truth may be come at by reasoning, but he might as well have said, that two and two are five; for if eternal truth may be come at by reasoning, then every degree of probability (of which reasoning consists) must be an argument for the truth in question; but every argument for the truth in question can only stand against an objection which must have existed before that argument could be made; therefore such reasoning must ever leave eternal truth just where it was. Hence it appears, that eternal truth being

self-evident only by the negation of error, whenever it is revealed, it must reveal itself. Hence it is, that God must work in us both to will and to do, because the utmost that we can do of ourselves is only to depart from error and probability. Hence it is, that treatises of morality, and defences of Christianity, have had so little effect upon the world; we say it is because people do not attend to them, but the true state of the case is, they cannot prove any one single proposition that they pretend to; when they talk of morality, they constantly, like *Tindal*, (tho' in Christ's mantle) refer to a knowledge we have not, else should we not want their morality; and when they pretend, like you, to defend Christianity, behold they come off with probabilities concerning the truth of the history of the *New Testament*. And hence it is, (if such a thing can be) that mankind are in deeper ignorance concerning true knowledge, than ever they were since the creation. It is, because they imagine, that they can have some true knowledge without its being preceded by true Goodness; it is because they think, that, by reasoning, and reading such books as yours, and *Tindal's*, and *Woolston's*, they can come at it; whereas, by beginning there, they cannot take a more effectual way to keep themselves in error.

All ages, all nations, and all religions, have had sticklers for morality, who have as universally agreed in the first principle that they set out upon, *viz.* that there is a God, and that we ought to obey him. But to shew, that this is a mere historical taught opinion, and that, in effect, they know not what they say, it is observable, that, as soon as they come to the executive power of that God's attributes, and the execution of their obedience to him, every man has an obedience, consequently a God, of his own.

This mistake of fancying we believe what we only think we know (but do not) is chiefly, if not wholly, owing

owing to our inattention to the nature of relative and absolute truth, things in themselves eternally distinct. If a man believes that there is a God, as much as he believes that he lives in a house, or that there is such a place as *London* or *Constantinople*, he thinks all is right as to that point; whereas he should know, that what is only relatively true, is not a whit the truer, properly speaking, than if it was relatively false; for, if the former be false in its cause, the latter can never be true in consequence of that cause: therefore a man that vindicates the existence of God, from the same principle of assurance that he vindicates the existence of *Constantinople*, or the house he lives in, is as much in error, as if there was no God, or no such places. Could we believe in God, and know him, as naturally as we know there is such a place as *Turky*, we should then, indeed, be in the state of nature God designed us for; for to know God, is not to know matter, corruptibility, &c. but this is the very thing we want, the very thing that Christ died for; because that a belief founded upon sense, is no belief at all, inasmuch as being alone, it is upon a footing with infidelity.

Whatever the soul believes to be good, it believes to be true, whatever it believes to be true, it believes to be eternally so; to constitute the act of faith, the soul does, and must unite itself to that in which it believes; when the soul therefore unites itself to any truth, which is only such in time, for a time, or relatively true, it unites itself to vanity, which vanity, by its faith or union with it, it does make, with respect to itself, as far as it is able, reality, that is, to be absolutely and eternally true; and therefore, by believing any thing, only relatively true, it must infallibly believe a lye.

Suppose a person, (with or without the help of Sir *Isaac Newton*, the gentleness and humility of whose

whose character seems to bespeak him of my opinion) is learned enough to prove, by mathematical demonstration, the truth of the copernican system, he may as much believe a lye, by believing this, (tho' it be true, relatively speaking) as if it was relatively false; for the soul being a creature of, or from eternity, whenever it operates or exerts itself in time, is out of its place; therefore, whilst it believes any thing, which is only true in time, it lives in time, consequently in the vanity of time, consequently in ignorance of the truth of eternity, because they are incompatible, or as light and darkness, to each other. To believe is as natural to the soul as to think is natural to the understanding, and reason may as well exist without thought, as the soul without faith; Whatever the soul believes in, from thence arises what is happiness, truth, wisdom, &c. to it, which happiness only becomes such, because it believes it eternal, or that by it it shall arrive at what it ultimately desires, *viz.* its native eternity; now it is no greater a wonder, nor more valuable a truth, that the copernican system should be true, than that such a quantity of silver should be an equivalent for a guinea, since one has been a truth, in effect, and will remain so as long as the other; nor is there more merit in knowing one than the other: But he that thinks himself wiser, happier, better, (for they are all link'd together) from the knowledge of the former, than the latter, in that wisdom, does affirm there is, and that there is truth and eternity in one, and not in the other; for if there was truth, there must be eternity, because they are inseparable; but as there is no absolute truth, consequently no eternity in either, it follows, that the object of the soul's happiness or wisdom, in which it believes, is built upon a false foundation, therefore it is foolishly wise, for with respect to himself, such a man has made temporal truth eternal truth, he has received what is only relatively true, exactly upon the footing as if it was

eter-

eternally so ; and when in any such case, he, like Mr. *Whiston*, betrays his being puffed up with it, every one (as it were, by instinct) bears witness to what I say, by thinking him, as they do you, a vain man.

The knowledge then called in Scripture the wisdom of this world, is folly with respect to true eternal knowledge, not only what is known, but what may be known, standing upon the same footing, if time and matter is coeval with its existence ; for supposing the nature, property, magnitude, matter and distance of the fixed stars could be proved to demonstration, it could be no greater a truth, than that two and two are four, and he that should think otherwise, having found it out, had better have been without it.

That knowledge, then, by which we judge of relative truth, and that knowledge by which we perceive eternal truth, are as light and darkness to each other ; when a man therefore will argue for the truth of Christianity, by the light of that power, by which he is able to demonstrate the truth of the history of the *New-Testament*, he does as wisely as if, by the science of optics, he pretended to demonstrate the nature and property of that light which is not material. The truth of the gospel history is founded upon argument, but with regard to Christianity itself, it is the very reverse, in so much that it is the very destruction of this faculty, so far as to see the vanity of all its deductions, how probable soever, and to depart from them, that makes way for the first dawning of truth upon the soul. A person who in humility dies to the world, and to all that vanity and self-sufficiency, which too often arise from a superior degree of worldly knowledge, may in the course of his repentant state frequently imagine, that he sees strong argumentative proofs for the truth of Christianity, and so he may, but they had not their original from the province of reason, else would they be proofs to others, as well as himself : But this is so far from being the case, that sup-

posing

posing himself and another to agree in the very terms of a proposition, yet, when they come to the meaning of it, nothing shall be more different. Therefore, as I observed before, there is no more need of proving Christianity, than of proving that two halves of the same thing should make the whole of it; neither is it capable of any other demonstration but what is as obvious; for whilst the will is bent upon the world, believes it good, and assents to the sufficiency of that reason, which commenced with it, in order to come at eternal knowledge, let a man think what he will, and believe what he will, it must be destitute of any eternal, consequently true foundation; and therefore, in this sense, no better than a lye: But if in his will he dies to these, *i. e.* departs from and desires no communication with them, he then awakes into the region of truth and day-light; he finds and experiences what in his desire, not in his reason, he was in pursuit of; he is united to a knowledge which exactly tallies with his wishes, and is what he wanted, and of the truth of which he just wants as much proof, as to be assured that he does possess what he already finds he does.

To shew the soundness and independency of this man's principles, let us suppose, (which is not absolutely impossible) that like a *Baratier* to Mr. *Whiston*, another MS. of the *New Testament* was found in some unthought of, yet secure place; that it was demonstrated to be older than any MS. we have hitherto seen, and that by such characters of antiquity, as should wholly take away all suspicion of forgery; let us suppose further, that there were some different readings thought very material, what would be the consequence? Why, to him, whose Christianity, both in the whole, and in part, was in his conscience only, and not in his reason, it would be of no signification at all; but what a miserable figure would you cut, with your brother wranglers, about letter and language. If there was a negative or two found pretty clear in some places, would

would you not be ashamed of your impertinent vindications of positive institutions and arbitrary commands. But, say you, if my notion concerning the second person should be right, and this MS. should confirm it? in answer to that, I say, that it would be a very great misfortune to you; for as you are solicitous about the truth, merely upon the account of victory, so the only effect it could have upon you, must be to blow up your vanity to a more enormous size, which I am sure would not be to your advantage upon any account. But suppose it was a *coup de grace* to your notion, (which would, if any thing could, be a serviceable piece of mortification to you) you have neither grace, nor modesty enough, to be ashamed of yourself, but would be pretending that you went according to the light God had given you. And do you think, that such a come-off would be an excuse for all that poison and ill-nature, which you and such disputants have continually been spitting at one another in all ages; far from it, I assure you, such an excuse (tho' plausible in itself) is not sufficient, you will never get rid of your folly by throwing the blame upon God, because he never did, nor can command you, or any man, to believe any truth farther than by the negation of error and probability, in the departing from which only it is self-evident. The light that was afforded you, was the mere suggestion of your own vanity and invention, and your obstinacy in the vindication of it, only to bring fuel to the same fire; therefore, while you have been believing christianity as a truth of yesterday, and defending it as some historical appearance in time, you have in that sense been defending a fiction of your own, and consequently, with respect to yourself, a lye. And yet all this while, you fancy yourself one of the lights of the world, and with most consummate assurance have put yourself upon a footing with *Luther*; whereas it is you, and such like, that by your defences of Christianity have done it more prejudice, than

any-body upon earth; for you have been building something like it, which is not it; and therefore, (as *Iamblichus* long ago observed, in a parallel case) the most opposite to it. You have founded Christianity upon a principle which must be denied, and perceived to be vain, before the least glimpse of it can appear; therefore it is an idol unto you. You pretend to prove Christianity with the same reason that you prove the three angles of a triangle equal to two right ones; and you know not, nor have found out, that that very reason is death and darkness unto it, and can never reach truth; that no eternal truth can come into the province of your understanding, whose proper object must, in the nature of things, be of a temporary, relative and perishable nature. In short, I take you to be like one of those men, supposed by *Plato*, to have led all their lives in some cave under ground, where they never saw the light of the sun, but only some empty thin shadows of such bodies as are upon the earth, which seeing, they think they see true bodies.

Now, Sir, to draw towards a conclusion, I will suppose, (tho' not take for granted) that the *New Testament* being thus set aside, and yet Christianity maintained to be true, you should ask these two questions; *first*, How a man who is not a Christian should be converted to Christianity? *Secondly*, How a man, who is a Christian, ought to defend it? But here we must observe, that no eternal absolute truth is capable of any proof, but what comes under the denomination of negative; what therefore eternal truth or God himself is, we know not, but by faith only, but what he is not, that we know unhappily enough. The same may be said of Christianity, which commenced in eternity; therefore what it is, how to propagate it, or to defend it, that I pretend not to declare, farther than in opinion; but that it is thought to be what it is not; that it is propagated by methods that do it harm, and de-

fended by arguments that tend to weaken it, that I think not very difficult to make appear.

In speaking then to the first of your questions, I say, that he who has the interest of true goodness at heart (the knowledge and possession of which we come at only by Jesus Christ) and would attempt to convert a rational creature to Christianity, (who confessedly was not one before) would not willingly, I suppose, take any method, which either directly or consequentially might impede his undertaking; but if such a well meaning person, in order to facilitate his work, made use of the name of Christ, or the *New Testament*, without the attestation of miracles, he must in the event greatly disserve his cause. He might think, that having gained a rational assent to the historical part of the *New Testament*, was making some small progress in his undertaking; but such thoughts must proceed from his ignorance of human nature, and also of the nature of that business with which he had to do; the knowledge of these would soon inform him, that whilst he was attempting to beget in his hearers a rational assent to the historical part of the gospel, as a preliminary to the practical, he was doing as wisely, as if in order to reinstate a body in its proper place he neglected to clear away those bodies, which might hinder such a restitution, and absurdly pushed it upon them. For I would ask, what does this rational assent effect? If it be answered, that it gives a sanction to, and is an enforcement of the practice of true goodness, I would ask again, do persons unconverted to Christianity know what true goodness is or no? if they do, they are then the very persons the Gospel only can, and would make all men; but if they do not, (as is already supposed) then that rational assent, which is intended to give a sanction to, and be an enforcement of true goodness, does indeed sanctify and enforce, (true goodness not being there) the practice of a natural counterfeit goodness, which not proceeding from Christian principles,

can never be acceptable to God. If it be said, that at the same time the authority of the *New Testament* is used by the preacher, as a sanction to the obedience of its precepts, that then the nature of true goodness is explained, and its power instilled, I ask which of these ought to be done first? since one of them must; whether the converter is not first to make known true goodness, and then, (if there was occasion) superadd the sanction and authority of the *New Testament*, or he is first to give an intimation of, and require an assent to, the history of the Fall and Redemption, and then make these a sanction to a virtue his hearers are unacquainted with; for if they are not Christians already, this must be the case. Now, if he does the second, before the first is effected, was he to study it, he could not do greater prejudice to Christianity.

To give a sanction to any proposition, whether understood, or not understood (may for any thing I know) be highly advantageous to it; but, to give a sanction to any proposition, the truth of which is not perceived, but yet fancied, imagined, or thought to be understood, is highly diserving the cause of that truth, and the strongest bar against the real knowledge of it. For if there is not a natural knowledge of what true goodness is, a false one by that means must be substituted in its room; whence it plainly follows, that the greater the sanction is to any true proposition, the worse it is for those who fancy they understand it but do not, their prejudices and misconceptions, by this means gaining more and more upon them. The truth then of the matter is, the name of Christ ought never to be mentioned, but where his power is present; neither did God ever command it to be mentioned otherwise. When the name and spirit of Christ are together, all power in heaven and earth are given to them, but where the name is assented to, but separated from it, there is very Antichrist. So that, though the power of working of miracles, is not necessary

cessary to every Christian, yet is it necessary to every man who would be a converter to Christianity, if in order to that, he would make use of the name of Christ, and the history of the *New Testament*; and therefore, they ought never to be mentioned, without an apostolical demonstration.

Again, He that sets about making converts to Christianity, ought to keep this design principally in view, *viz.* either to effect the thing he undertakes, or leave those in whom he cannot effect it in the situation he found them; but if he brings them over to assent to the name and history, and does not at the same time convey the meaning, or manifest the power thereof, if they assent to the name and history, they will put a meaning thereto, which not being the true one, they are farther from it, than they were before, inasmuch as they fancy they understand it, when they do not, and are made hypocrites, whilst both themselves, and the preacher are ignorant of the matter. And this may be the case with men, who indeed are Christians, and mean exceeding well to Christianity, only fancy they are authorised to preach the gospel, when they are not.

If the truth of any history can be proved the truth of the *New Testament* may, which when a man has done, with such authenticity that his audience assents to it, he thinks that assent ground sufficient, upon which to inforce the practice of piety, and presently infers, “*how good we ought to be, if such and such facts be true:*” Whereas he quite mistakes the matter, and supposes the very thing in question; for he supposes we have naturally in us a principle of true goodness, (which we as naturally believe,) or that this assent will naturally inspire it; neither of which suppositions being true, all the piety he can expect to follow from such discourses, must arise from a false principle, which his audience taking for a true one, he by that means leaves them in greater ignorance than he found them.

But

But the apostles, who preached the gospel by the command of God, in the demonstration of the spirit and of power, had none of these facts to hold forth, made venerable by antiquity, which might excite such hopes and fears as are naturally vain and superstitious ; no, they constantly took care either make those with whom they had to do Christians, or left them where they found them ; or if like *Ananias* and *Sapphira* their hearers chose for carnal purposes to retain the name of Christ, there was no involuntary or well-meant cheat put upon them, unapprehended by both preacher and hearer ; for they knew themselves to be, and were conscious that they were, hypocrites. The yea and nay of a rational assent can never make converts to the gospel, upon any other principle than that upon which *Thomas* was converted, viz. a superstitious fear, which became such, as arising from the unwilling conviction of his reason ; and how acceptable that was to our Lord, let the context bear witness ; *blessed are they that have not seen, have not sought after external evidence, in its nature insufficient, but in their departure from it, have believed.*

Now though Almighty God did never give authority to any man to use his son's name, in order to convert mankind to his gospel, but gave the power also ; yet can it never be contrary to his will, that Christianity or the knowledge of true goodness should be propagated. We see the name and history does not necessarily imply the spirit and power thereof, therefore can only tend to delude those who are not beforehand Christians ; let us set aside the name and history, and so confine ourselves to what directly concerns the spirit and power thereof, that they who chuse not to embrace it, may continue in the very same situation they were before any attempts were made towards their conversion. In order to this then, that man who has the gospel at heart, and who would gladly communicate it, though not blessed with the power of miracles, must
in

in my opinion proceed upon some such plan as this. By the medium of reason, he must speak as far as he is able to the conscience of his intended convert, and there shew him, that he is not in the state of nature that a good God would have placed him ; this he may insist upon, without being afraid of any bad consequence, how seldom soever he may find a good one. He may expatiate farther upon this subject, by endeavouring to make him sensible, that he is capable of happiness, which every gratification of his desires, demonstrates to him, that he only has in hope. He may assure him, that however complaisant, (as he imagines himself) he may be to his creator, by way of allowing and vindicating his moral and natural attributes ; yet, that by supposing his own condition in this world is exactly as God created him, exclusive of reasons on his side, is in effect to deny every attribute moral and natural. For thus, and very justly, he may argue with *Epicurus*, in effect : If you are in the state of nature God designed you, exclusive of reasons on your own side, either God would have made you happier, but could not ; he could, and would not ; or else he neither could nor would : But if the supposition of any of these does destroy the idea of a good and powerful God, which is inferred from your not being in such a state of nature, as this God would have placed you in ; then this must be the inference, *viz.* the imperfection of your condition is owing to yourself. If a man once believes this, and that it must have been his own fault, that occasioned it, (as no man need doubt but it was) ; he does at the same time confess, that he must be out of the favour of God, and a disobedient creature, in as much as nothing but sin could have occasioned it. Now if he believes himself a sinful creature, consequently out of the favour of God, the medium through which he sees this is of no consequence at all, whether he believes the account of *Adam* and *Eve*, the pre-existent state of his soul, or any other account

account, it is of no signification; since by believing himself a sinful creature, he does as naturally fall in with the implicit knowledge of the three first chapters of *Genesis*, and from thence is introduced to the redemption (though he has never heard, or shall hear a single word of either,) as if he had stood by our first parents when they disobeyed God, and under the cross when our Saviour died. A person who endeavours to make converts to Christianity, by no other means than convincing (if such a thing is possible) his disciples, that in their best natural state, they are in sensitive error and rational darkness, does certainly begin at the right place, and upon the only true foundation; if he gains the person, he is sure that he becomes a good man, upon the only good motive, or a Christian; if he does not, he can but be where he was, and however, in that respect, no hypocrite; whereas whilst people go with a history in their hands, and talk of what happened between seventeen and eighteen hundred years ago, they may mean well to human nature, but certainly they know nothing of themselves, or of it. They think, if they can but prevail upon their audience, to give a rational assent, subscribe to a Creed, and call themselves Christians, the business appears to them to be some-what advanced; but indeed it is quite the contrary, instead of the substance they have unluckily propagated the shadow, their hearers fancy they have got something, which something being only in the imagination, is worse than nothing; upon a natural worldly morality they throw the mantle of Christ, the last state of their converts by that means being far worse than the first. You will say the history of the fall and redemption is introduced, in order to shew our original state, &c. but then it is forgotten how naturally our reason siezes upon every appearance, and fancies an assent is a great part of the work; nay and will make it so in spite of all that can be said to the contrary; whereas the external knowledge of the fall and redemption

tion are truths of that nature, that as on the one hand, it is the greatest pleasure and blessing, relatively speaking, to be acquainted with them, a right foundation being laid, *i. e.* our inbred depravity removed, (which no name alone or history has any tendency to do;) so on the other, it is the greatest unhappiness to take them on any other terms, they had better be intirely unknown, and, if offered, refused.

Was there a necessary connection between a rational assent and cordial obedience, then would the historical knowledge of the gospel be a proper introduction, but there is none; for a person assenting to the gospel as to two and three being five, is not a whit the more able to put a single precept into practice; he may imagine, that to do good and to communicate is a very easy command, but the utmost stretch of his rational obedience will be erroneous, 'till by the resignation of his will, (which is death to our natural sufficiency) he has suffered that light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, to inform his conscience of that motive, of which his reason can have no conception, and which 'till that be done, he had better never have heard of the gospel, for the reasons before assigned.

Having shewn how a well-meaning man may endeavour to propagate Christianity, by methods that may do prejudice to the cause; I shall now shew, how it may be defended to as bad a purpose.

People that undertake to defend any truth, too seldom regard what sort of arguments they are, which they make use of to support it; for if they are of weight enough, to convince or silence the adversary, they make no scruple to conclude them very good. In this case nothing is more common, than the convincer and convinced, mutually to concur (though imperceptibly to each other) in deceiving themselves; for not having observed, that the truth in question, must change its nature, to the nature of that argument or reason by

H

which

which it is supported, they can do nothing more by using an inadequate argument, than establish the appearance of that truth. For a false argument can never prove a real truth; when therefore a man thinks that he believes any truth, upon the strength of an argument which afterwards proves to be false, or not an argument for the truth in question, then the truth in question, built upon that argument, must fall to the ground: But truth cannot fall to the ground; therefore it was only the appearance of it, which was the thing in question and the only thing which such a man proves. Now to apply this to the business in hand; they that do believe or assent to the truth of Christianity, or the existence of a God, upon the strength of any arguments, would do well to consider, whether or no these arguments are proofs of the truths in question; for if these arguments upon being looked into, should appear indeed to be no proofs of the truths which they are brought to ascertain, and therefore to be false, then do those people, who think that they believe those truths upon the strength of these arguments, either believe only in the appearance of those truths, which have no deeper a foundation than their own fancy, or if they do believe these truths, their belief is not founded upon these arguments, how much soever they may imagine they are. The existence of God, and truth of Christianity, (or the truth of the existence of the spirit of Christ, from whom Christianity is) are eternal truths. There can be no objection to an eternal truth, but what is imaginary; if there can be no objection against it but what is imaginary, there can be no argument for it, but what is the same; they therefore who believe either of these, their faith cannot be founded upon argument, because if it is, that argument being imaginary, consequently false, the truth built upon it can never be more real or true. In an argument proving a proposition, it is required, that the argument does participate of the nature of the proposition to be proved, or it can have no connection with it, therefore

can

can be no argument for it ; time and eternity are as light and darkness, or rather as something and nothing to each other ; God and Christ exist in eternity, if we will prove their existence ; we must bring arguments from thence, but where shall we get them ? since all the arguments we can produce, have existed since the creation. Neither therefore is the creation being material, corruptible, imperfect, &c. any proof of the being of a God ; neither the *New-Testament* of the truth of Christianity, since they are both truths of yesterday ; and as such can never be arguments for eternal truths.

And indeed, *a posteriori*, it is plain that these are no proofs for what they are alledged ; for if they were they would have their effect, but they are only imagined to be such, and therefore they who understand and vindicate them are never the better men, nor they who do not ever the worse.

To know God, is to be good, happy, wise, &c. not to know him, evil, miserable, foolish, &c. but not to know him, and yet fancy we know him, is to be the farthest from him ; now he whose knowledge of God is built upon any argument which has not been eternally such, is that very unhappy person who fancies he knows God but does not.

If the creation in its present imperfect manner of being, can never be an argument for the existence of an infinitely perfect being, then they who make it an argument for one, make it an argument for what it is not, consequently the God that is proved, is only in their own imagination. But the immediate cause of the present scene of things ; that cause I say, which thus put them into the state of materiality, corruptibility, and imperfection, cannot be perfect ; neither the cause of that cause, though carried up to the longest duration of time we can conceive, for still the idea of imperfection must be left behind, in some degree ; else whence imperfection at all ? Now if the materiality, corruptibility, &c. of this present scene of things,

could not immediately arise from a good and perfect being, they must from something which is in opposition to him ; nothing can be in opposition to him but evil, therefore evil, which has its beginning from, and end in, the disobedience of the creature, must have caused the materiality, corruptibility, and whatever else has its rise from, or is connected with these, in the world. The creation then, considered in its imperfect state, as consisting of matter, is only a proof of the existence of evil, and of our unhappy co-operation with it ; and they that do make it an argument for the being of God, must implicitly ascribe to him imperfection, which not belonging unto God, the proposition, consequently the argument which must suppose it, falls to the ground. As well might an imprisoned malefactor blame the laws, and not his violation of them for his confinement, as a man say, that God created this world for him ; the propositions would be equally false ; for as the violation of the law did produce, or in some sense create that prison to the former, so disobedience must have produced, or have been the occasion, of the creation of this world by the permission of God to the latter. In short, whatever argument is made use of, to prove the existence of a wise and perfect being, which argument would equally prove the existence of a being superior only in such wisdom and perfection as we find in ourselves ; or whatever argument is made use of to prove an eternal truth, which argument must be the same, supposing that eternal truth only a truth of the longest duration ; such arguments do destroy the nature of true wisdom and eternity, and disserve the interest of that God, whose attributes they are. For as it is impossible to have any idea of wisdom or power, but from our own ideas, which have their foundation in the folly and weakness of this world ; or any idea of eternity, but what is compounded of the parts of time, coeval with the same ; so when we think to prove any of these, we at last miss of the truth sought for, — only proving by
the

latter the existence of time, and by the former a wisdom and power, which though greater, (as in the degree of more or less of the same thing) is yet of the same nature with our own.

To give an instance that may illustrate this; suppose a person, after thinking that he has had some years knowledge of another, does find out, that he had conceived such an opinion of him, as was directly opposite to that other person's real character; will any one say, that the former knew the latter (properly speaking) before this eclaireissement? Or will they not rather say, that in fact he knew nothing of him, but that what he called the knowledge of him, was no more than a fictitious character in his own fancy, existing nowhere else; and yet this latter person existed as much, whilst the former only thought he knew him, as he did after he really knew him. Just so much do they know of God, who talk of knowing or believing in him, upon the strength of any argument which has not been, is, and always will be eternally such. Hence it appears, that whatever truths are connected with eternity, they are merely the objects of faith, and so far incomprehensible to our reason, that the moment they come into its province, they are lost; whilst people therefore pretend to prove the being of a God, by arguments which must have existed since the creation, they do nothing more than fall in love with their own wisdom, and set up a God of such like power as their own, in the mean time forgetting, that *the world, by such wisdom, never did, nor can know God*; that he is to be found in the consciences of all men only, back again to which place, from this world of probability and argument, the word or son of God continually calls us; so that if the being of a God, and the truth of Christianity are eternal truths, then, by recommending them to the assent of our reason, we change their nature; by this means, as far as we are able, hindering their efficacy upon our con-

sci-

sciences. With regard to the latter, *viz.* the truth of Christianity, I am of opinion, the wickedness of mens lives have not done more prejudice to that influence it naturally tends to have upon our souls, than the reasons and arguments which are given for the truth of it, which having no connection with it, are consequently false and frivolous, and can only set up something like it. I shall just attempt to lay open a few of them, and have done.

What volumes of reasons have been given for our Saviour's appearance at the time he did, many of them false, but those that are true having no tendency to prove the proposition laid down; when we believe it was the best time, we are at the utmost stretch of our knowledge, but when we pretend to prove that it was the best, we do nothing more than proclaim our own ignorance; there not being one single reason for his appearance at that time, which does any thing more than alter the terms of the question, if it be asked why he appeared then? But people not being content with alledging the completion of the prophecies, and such like, which only alter the terms of the question, have had the assurance to vindicate it, sometimes by downright lyes, at other times by arguments, the veracity of which rests wholly upon themselves. It has been pompously said, that the temple of *Janus* was shut, and that oracles ceased; and these have been made arguments for the truth of Christianity, but it is well known they are both false; it is said, that a greater degree of wickedness, and a greater degree of wisdom, (as if they could be universal at the same time) overspread the face of the earth at that time; but this, I think, rests upon the authority of the vouchers. Indeed there is not only no reason given for our Saviour's appearance at that time, but it is impossible there should, unless we were in that eternity where the promise was made, then should we see the connection between it and its completion; but till that is the case,

case, we must ever talk at random. Every single reason that can be given for our Saviour's appearance at the time he did, will hold stronger for any othertime nearer the creation ; for according to all external uses that can be made of his incarnation and death, the more people there were acquainted with it, the greater the blessing.

When some defenders are pressed about the partial promulgation of the gospel, then comes in a law, and a religion of nature to their assistance. Now, if Christianity can save one man, and the religion of nature another, then must there be two true religions ; if there be two true religions, they must either be one better than the other, or equally good ; and let them take which they will, and see what pretty work they make of God's attributes. Well, but the gospel is an exposition of that eternal original law ; if so, then that exposition is either necessary to be known or not ; and here we are as fast as ever. Sometimes indeed being pressed hard, and having some plain texts of Scripture for it, they will tell you, that the merits of Christ in the promise to *Adam*, extended to all men as much before as after the incarnation ; which concession, if they meant any thing by it, is giving up every other argument ; for if men could once be saved by the merits of Christ, and yet be intirely ignorant of his incarnation, why cannot they now ? why are they to run after, and fight about a secondary grant, when they have the original promise, word, or Son of God, (which as a gift to our fallen nature, is the merits of Christ) speaking in their consciences ; this could save once, and God and man are still the same, why it cannot save now, I would gladly be informed ? Again, object the uncertainty of the *New Testament*, the various readings, interpolations, together with the many passages not understood, or taken in different senses, the answer is, there is as much understood, as is necessary to salvation, *i. e.* vice is discouraged, and vir-

virtue inculcated ; this is the whole to serve a turn ; but do they assent to this, because it is in the *New Testament* ? no, but because every man has a natural idea of a virtue, and a vice of his own, (else the *bonum* and *honestum* would have long since been settled), which he would gladly have all the world practise invariably, (himself perhaps now and then excused) which natural idea he not seeing how the Scripture condemns, he imagines it confirms : So that, in the event, he only makes the Scripture a sanction for what without it he would equally have been assured of ; when they can defend their paper and ink no longer, at last they are forced to come off with, “ thus and thus it pleased “ God”, tho’ here they mean by this as little, as by the application of Christ’s merits before his incarnation ; and therefore it is observable, they never bring it forth, but out of wrath and vexation, and in hopes of silencing an adversary, who has unfolded and laid open the weakness of all their other arguments, This is an argument, if it may be called such, which if used, as it ought to be, and not out of spite, is the very situation Christ would bring us to, the very door to the true knowledge of him ; but this implies our ignorance of the matter, consequently is death to our sufficiency, which would fain bring every thing to the standard of reason. Even he that knew himself to be deceived, and yet received it in the spirit of humility, as by the permission of God, would undoubtedly stand fairer for the favour of God, upon a supposition that the gospel history should prove, in whole or part, to be false, than he who had any dependence upon facts and reasons, let that transaction be ever so true ; because in that very place of man, where humility is, let the occasion be what it will, there is Christ, and there only can he be. Had *Quadratus* and *Aristides* received no surer word of prophecy concerning the truth of Christianity, than what a defender of it by facts and arguments could have given them, they might very just-

justly have held it in contempt, because considered in this light, it is a mere fiction; to talk of a person coming with proposals of a religion, which is true to day, and was not so yesterday, which is necessary to the salvation of one man, and not another, is making the Almighty such a being indeed, as our arguments tend to prove him; but at the same time, so weak and short-sighted, that the absurdity of such a supposition does not deserve seriously to be argued against.

The truth is, no man does, or ever did understand, consequently receive the *New Testament*, without a previous preparation exclusive thereof, which preparation is the gospel itself, whatever further knowledge any man may have of it, consequent upon that preparation, that is merely a temporary and relative good or advantage, and can be of no moment to his future and eternal salvation; for this preparation must be a participation of eternal truth, or it could be no preparation for the reception of it; if it is a participation of eternal truth, it is eternal truth itself, for eternal truth is not divisible; therefore, whoever has that preparation, or as we find it mentioned in the *New Testament*, *the son of peace*, may be as unconcerned about the *New Testament*, or any passage in it, as about any other passage in any other author.

How sadly then do they mispend their time, who endeavour to reconcile passages, and prove facts? of how little signification is it, to bandy about probabilities, in order to prove the resurrection? since supposing it true, it is but an historical truth, about which whosoever is concerned, (till there be a resurrection of truth in his own soul, and then he need not) acts as simply, as if he was concerned about the situation of *Constantinople*. But let us suppose, that Mr. *West* had missed this great truth, and by the omission or addition of some passage, had probableized the other way, would not truth and error have been the same? would not the way from the latter to the former still have been by

I

going

going from probability and argument, and not through it? they that knew in what they believed, would be unconcerned about it, and they that did not, it might be of advantage to, by setting them to look into themselves for Christ, and not at a dead letter. Was every MS. of the *New Testament* in the world to agree with the utmost exactness, even to the propriety of a comma in the history of our Saviour's incarnation, so far from serving the cause of true Christianity, it would be a prejudice to it; they that believe in the book, and are concerned about it, are in error enough already: But had the writers and transcribers been a little more accurate, and thereby given such people a handle to use the providence of God, as they do his will, the obstinacy and pride of those who think that Christianity has any thing to do with natural reason, or in any shape makes application to it, would be scarce supportable.

No, Sir, the defences of eternal truth, by the medium of arguments which have their foundation in time, is losing the kernel, and fighting for the shell; true Christianity has, and ever will suffer, by all such methods, such people unwarily sapping the foundation of it, at the same time that they imagine they support it; the reason indeed generally is this, knowing nothing more of Christianity than the history, consequently being conscious to themselves, that if that drops, all their foot-hold is gone, they will not admit the clearest arguments that have a tendency to discover the absurdity of an historical religion.

But let us not be afraid, let God be true, and every man a liar; let us suffer this gilding to drop off, and see if we cannot find an eternal foundation for an eternal truth; when we are asked why Christ appeared not sooner? we will answer, that had he not appeared yet, truth and Christianity would have been the same; that his incarnation, abstracted from that promise which derived its efficacy from it, is of no manner of signi-
fica-

fication, that before the death of Christ in our nature, his eternal spirit had the very same effect, influence, and power, which it has had since, else could there never have been a good man before his appearance, or else there must be two principles of goodness. That with regard to the *New Testament*, take away the arbitrary commands (which whether they oblige us as well as the apostles, is a dispute far from being determined) and in what regards the morality thereof, we shall meet with nothing new. He that said the kingdom of Heaven was within us, did mean nothing more nor less, than that to know ourselves was the truest knowledge, inasmuch as they are convertible propositions, for if the kingdom of Heaven is within us, the highest way to it must be to know ourselves; if to know ourselves be the great knowledge, then the kingdom of God or truth must be within us. To give an instance or two more, if to bear and forbear do exactly import the same thing, as *to take up our cross and follow Christ*; it does not signify which of these injunctions we comply with, since if we really do with either, it must be by the same power or spirit, therefore the effect will be the same. Again, if the virtues are inseparable, according to *Plato*, and the vices according to *Zeno*, then *Plato* says he that is faithful or virtuous in little, is virtuous in much; and *Zeno*, he that offends in one point offends in all; and therefore if Christ be the fountain of all truth, (as he is) then there is no medium; and they that are not against him, must be for him, and they that are not for him, must be against him; and not only in these few instances, but throughout the gospel, there is not one moral precept, but the truth of it has been perceived and insisted upon, by all wise, good, and regenerate men, either directly or consequentially, in all ages and all nations.

Not that mankind are a bit the better for their being acquainted with those or any other moral truths consider-

ed explicitly, whether taught more or less generally, with or without a sanction: A man may imagine, that had he lived in our Saviour's time, or was he assured, that every word of the *New Testament* was true, that then he would fulfill all its commands; but this is mere delusion arising from the opinion we have of the sufficiency of our reason and the false supposition that we have naturally and of ourselves a power to be good; for was Christ to die at this time, or were we ever so sure that the *New Testament* was true, we should find, that all this rational and sensible knowledge had no tendency to raise in our hearts the Spirit of Christ or true goodness, without which, the greater the miracle or sanction was to any moral truth, the more envious we should be, and the more bitter it would be to us, exactly as when our Saviour did appear. And very just it is, that this should be the case, else would God be unequal, and a respecter of persons, unless (if this sensible evidence could effect that obedience, or give that power) he gave the same evidence to every man born into the world; whereas God speaks to no part of man but his conscience, and there to all alike; they that do believe in him, or do not believe this world to be good, are equally good, and equally wise in his sight; are equally acceptable, and equally partake of all moral truth and knowledge implicitly, their hearing of it, or perceiving of it in such an assemblage of words, as a prophet, an apostle, or a philosopher might declare it, is of no moment at all beyond the present world. All I would have understood from hence is, that truth has been, and always will be the same, that there never was, nor never will be but one cause of our being made partakers of it, tho' operating through various mediums, that we may assent to what the apostles and philosophers have wrote, without being at all the nearer to it, and that the author of it, in all men, both in whole and in part, is that power, light, son, or word of God, common to, and in the

con-

consciences of all men, independent of their rationality.

But to return, if it be asked, why since the coming of our Saviour, it has not pleased God, by some means, to make this written word universal, as (if it had any tendency in itself, to promote the salvation of mankind) it ought? let it be answered, that our Saviour gave no orders for the writing of it, which surely he would have done, had the writing of it been absolutely necessary. If it be said, that he knew the apostles would write it, I would ask such a person, what he would say to the Papists, if they argued, that Christ knew what their Hierarchy would be at this day? and therefore did not particularly order it, would a Protestant believe it of divine institution from such a reply? The apostles had owned our Saviour for their lord and master, and therefore they ought to fulfill his commands, but to exceed them, was no part of their commission. To preach the gospel was incumbent upon them, but whether or no they would write those accounts of that transaction which they have left behind them, seems to be intirely left to their own choice. That the apostles did intend the glory of God, and good of mankind by such narratives, is very certain; and that whatever is so intended, is well-pleasing to God, I believe, is as certain; but how that glory and good has (*as yet*) been served, let the present scene of things, and the annals of former ages declare, how they may be served, seems not as yet to have appeared. Suppose the *New Testament* had never been wrote, think we that God would have left himself without a witness upon earth? would not the same eternal spirit of truth, (which is Christ) have continued to enlighten the consciences of all men, that would have submitted to it? doubtless it would. The name and power of Christ would not then have been unhappily sundered, but the parallel between the prophet and the apostle gloriously kept up. Every age and every nation might have

have seen apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers of God's own sending, in the spirit as well as name of Christ, whilst a pretence to a Free Enquiry could never have sprung up. But alas! as soon as mankind unhappily got hold of a book to call the gospel, giving out, that in it was some rule of faith, and in it was contained all things necessary to salvation, or such like declarations; then did they (with respect to themselves) forestall the goodness of God, putting Antichrist in the place of his Son, there to reign triumphantly. Then was the mantle of Christ put upon the rudiments of this world, and held forth for his doctrine, mankind descanting upon his name, and explaining his words, unhappily and unwarily, losing by that very means the spirit and power thereof.

As true philosophy in the heathen world gave rise to the race of sophists, men, who misinterpreting things well said by the philosophers, and putting their own false notions to them, did imagine the philosophers meant what *they* did, than which nothing was more different; so our disputers for the letter of the *New Testament* do assent fully to the truth thereof (as there is no more room to doubt it upon the whole, nor so much as some other histories, whose veracity is maintained); then putting their own ideas to the moral truths therein contained, (than which, perhaps, nothing is more foreign) they call themselves advocates for Christianity, whereas they are mere sophists; and setting aside a little prejudice and education, are as much advocates for the Koran. These men fancy they do Christianity great service, and indeed they have as much the appearance of it, as the sun has the appearance of motion round the earth, but the first is as true service, as the second is true motion.

The great misfortune is, we fancy we know what we do not, an evil which has been complained of in all ages, and the first and greatest barr to the knowledge of all real truth; and not only so, but unhappily for us,

us, our education generally tends to promote the delusion. Let but a gentleman of tolerable vivacity understand, that *ἀλήθεια* is *veritas*, and *veritas* truth, he will tell you presently what a philosopher says, who for forty or fifty years, out of love for truth, had lived in a state of mortification and abstinence from all sensible objects, or an apostle, who when he spoke, was immediately inspired. Now this is the very criterion of sophistry, and the only reason I can think of for our being told, that *Socrates* applied to men to convert them to the true religion, whilst their minds were warm with gratitude towards Heaven; as if any man stood in need of being converted to any truth or religion, whose mind was capable of being warmed with gratitude towards God. To suppose that man is born with a natural capacity of knowing God or truth, and of having his mind warmed with gratitude towards that God, is to suppose a man in that very condition to which Christ came to restore him, and is so far from being the truth of the matter, that it is impossible that any man, whilst in the body, should (as it is generally understood) ever be in such a condition, for the very utmost we can know of truth, is only by renunciation or negation of its contrary, which must ultimately resolve itself into faith; and therefore the wisest and best of men have said, that they only knew, (tho' that is not a just application of the word) that they knew nothing; not said out of an affectation of humility, as I might say it, or this gentleman, who seems so thoroughly acquainted with *Socrates's* sentiments, but as a declaration intimately perceived. I have now, Sir, nothing more to add, and therefore, with heartily wishing that you would seriously consider and put in practice *St. Paul's* advice, as delivered in the eighteenth verse of the third chapter of his first epistle to the *Corinthians*, I conclude myself yours, &c.

1221

A letter to the Will. Winston occasioned by his publication of the memoirs
of his own life

London 1750

Epist. 435 v

urn:nbn:de:bsb:12-bsb10403240-5